

Montana State Rehabilitation Council

July 13 – 14, 2017

Disability Determination Services Conference Room

Members present: Amy Capolupo, Tiffany Costa, Wayne Dagel, Lisa Gault, Anna Gibbs, Kathy Hampton, Rick Heitz, Barbara Kriskovich, Nick Domitrovich, Frank Podobnik, John Senn, Scott Trent, and Michael Woods.

Members absent: Coreen Faulkner, Donna Marie Robnett, Arlene Templer, and Linda Zermeno (all excused)

Staff and visitors present: Chanda Hermanson-Dudley, Mike Hermanson, Bill Harant, Beverly Berg, Shawn Tulloch, Sheri Vukasin, Barbara Schiedermayer, and Beth Brenneman.

Rick Heitz opened the meeting and introductions were made. The minutes from February meeting were approved.

Announcement: Mike Hermanson reminded the Council that the Governor's Report is a developing document. There are other states' Governor Reports for the Council to review. This will be discussed tomorrow.

Public Comment:

Beth Brenneman, attorney from Montana Disabilities Rights, stated that over the last year she has been watching with dismay budgetary issues facing VRBS which has culminated in the closure of all Categories. She needs more time to look at Strategic Plan to give any type of reasonable comments.

Review of potential Council Members:

Applications, cover letters, and resumes of two potential members for the Council were passed out. After discussion, the Council made recommendations on these potential members to join on the Council based on their experience and knowledge. Shawn will forward the recommendations to the Administrator of DET Division.

Discussion was made on how to get more members on the Council. There are about members finishing their terms on 10-1-2017. Mike H. will email his CRP and 121 Project contacts. Nick will reach out to his tribal affiliations and Scott Eychner, the Workforce Services Administrator, for Business, Industry, and Labor representatives. Barbara voices importance of getting members from smaller communities. John suggests VR counselors to ask around in the smaller communities. Amy will ask other universities.

Federal/State Updates, Nick Domitrovich:

Question was asked on why there is an acting Division Administrator. Both Jim Marks and Bob Runkel are on Administrative Leave – this is HR matter. Nick shared with the Council on the budget issues. There are really talented people in Budget Office trying to fix the problem. What is the budget deficit? We don't know because things can be flexed. There are myriad of funding lines. We get the Rehab grant, SE grant, IL grant, and then we have state appropriations so you can move state money around to try to flex that Federal money where you need to. We carried over a large deficit from 2016. Question is best way to make that up is how much. Maintenance of effort in Rehab Act, the more you move on the state side to chase old deficits the more risk you run. Sheri Vukasin explained further: Federal grant which depends, base grant is usually around

\$11 million, then we apply for re-allotment, 20% hold back you apply for some of that re-allotment. The last three years federal re-allotments were \$2.1 to \$2.6. We had overspent by approximately \$4 million in September 2016. At the end of 2016, we were able to gather up some of cover short fall. Overspend in 2016 means we are expected to spend that amount in state funds in 2018. We are looking at requesting another re-allotment. Chanda shared with the Council that in the FY 2016, we took 76% more applications and did not project the huge influx and huge spike in expenses from July to September 2016. The Pre-ETS initiatives and the 511 initiatives caused the influx of applicants. These are the populations that we were not serving; we just did not predict the level of expenditures it took. Nick stated that Colorado, Utah, and Oregon went through this two years ago. Currently there are 1776 on the waiting list: Category One – 734; Category Two – 638; Category Three – 404. Category Three was closed since October 2015. There are 3400 people currently active in IPEs. This is being monitored carefully – hope that when it gets to a certain point, we can invite the next 100 people waiting. We will not be able to just one day open Category One.

Field Services Updates, Chanda Hermanson-Dudley:

Last February, we were put on a hiring freeze to help DPHHS with the budget. We had interviews scheduled in Miles City and Bozeman but we were not allowed to hire. We have not hired anyone for these vacate positions. There has have been several resignations and retirements. It is unknown when the hiring freeze will be lifted. Report on vacancies: four supervisors, five counselors, two support staff, two BLVS positions, five positions in Central Office. Fair Hearing report: one appeal – it had something to do with closing of categories. The Federal requirements of the July 1st date reporting has changed drastically. All the data elements for the Pre-ETS between July 1 and September 30 need to be reported. We had been working on a separate case management system for \$250,000 within MACS. However, with the funds restriction, we are doing the paper and pencil way to do this and a work-around in PERQs. The staff received training on serving Pre-ETS to those who are potentially eligible (not applied for VR) and many of those who are in Statue 04 on the waiting list. MACS update: it is working fine and sometimes it does not behave. Mike shared that the new 911 has 50 new fields – 75% of the 911 data reporting has changed. The final changes came out the day before they went into effect. Question was asked about the mail/phone services in the rural areas like in Browning. Two counselors from Kalispell are doing well in Browning – they received Blackfeet names in a naming ceremony. Chanda talked about her team working on aligning the VRBS Policies and ARM with WIOA. The policy manual will be in a question/answer format in ARM. The team will continue to work on an operation manual with step by step for the counselors. All purchase requests must be filled out – this is good for the counselors to review all the eligibilities to make sure that the categories are being done appropriately.

Windmills Training Module; Darrel Hannum of Havre Vocational Rehabilitation and Carol Lamey of Job Service:

Last November, VRBS and Labor partnered to get the Windmills' Train the Trainer for 20 staff total. There are twelve modules that are meant to teach employers about disability. The presenters did a module "Pick a Disability" with the Council. Chanda stated that they have trained staff in every area to deliver the Windmills modules, and it can be done at no cost for any group or business.

"The workplace is Changing: Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act – Section 511 Subminimum Wage Career Counseling" – Tom Osborn of North Central Independent Living Center:

Career Counseling and INR goes out to anybody working at subminimum wage. It does not address the integration factor. It does not deal with individuals that are in segregated work groups. There are different parts of the Act that will address that. IL Centers were asked if we would go out and perform this career counseling and give informed choice about whether they want to keep working for subminimum wage or work in a competitive-integrated setting. Anybody working prior to September 19, 2016 has to participate in a counseling setting. Anyone 24 or younger that is receiving subminimum wage had to participate in at least two sessions – once every six months. Anyone employed after September 19, 2016 and at age 24 or younger

must get Pre-ETS services before they can request employment at subminimum wage. We did not have anybody within the implementation that was within that lower age bracket. We may start seeing people show up. The statutes and rules are pretty clear. Due to all the changes, IL Centers set up meetings to educate and provide informed choices. This change does not prevent 14-c certificate holders from continuing to provide subminimum wage. Based on the data collection, we had 20% of individual employees opted for competitive-integrated. Only 198 out of 667 CCIR sessions. 1202 people were initially listed from DLI as working at subminimum wage, but then a number of 14-c certificate holders started paying employees minimum wage – that 1202 is not accurate anymore. Most of the 14-c certificate holders are up for renewal this year and most are dropping the certificate. The IL Centers contracts to do CCIR is up on September 30th.

Blind and Low Vision Update; Beverly Berg:

Everyone is working hard. There is at least one counselor in each officer. We are trying to reduce the wait list. We are going to have the orientation and mobility staff to the training of the business people and have the therapists do more work with the clients and do the assessments on the equipment. We are learning the Windmills modules and will train the businesses in the community. A counselor in Great Falls has taken over more cases with the counselors leaving. The secretary in Great Falls has retired. There is \$9,000 left until September. The salary needs to go to VR budget. We offer services to older blind population such as lower cost magnification aid, training on cooking and writing, care of the home. The purpose is to maintain independence. The eligibility age is over 50. We have “I Can Connect” program through Perkins for the Blind. Perkins has taken on grants for other states without any grant support. All the information for the application is available for those who want to apply and may be eligible for the services. They do follow through with training so the person can become comfortable with the equipment. Once they get the training, the equipment becomes their property. 55 people are using this program. So far, people using “I Can Connect” are older, a few youth. The outreach consultants from Montana School for the Deaf and Blind use this program for those who did not the equipment. Another update: Beverly is leading the Assistive Technology team. Handouts of the AT newsletters are passed out. The purpose of the articles is to focus on a functional limitation and gather information about it. This is a resource for the counselors. The next topic is social and behavior issues in a school or work environment.

Governor’s Report discussion; Mike Hermanson:

Discussion on the Governor’s Report format and content. Possible ideas: a success story with 511; success story with business; show a full scope instead of just one perspective; show what has been done for all people with disability (not just one disability); make the pictures a bit bigger; keep the format simple. Discussion on the number of copies to send out: fewer copies means higher cost; however there isn’t a large audience. Printed 40 copies last year. There is no public relations plan. We could send to legislative but we are not allowed to. Mike also talked about the Strategic Plan update

Questions from Client Assistance Program; Kathy Hampton:

Kathy has been in contact with several VR clients and has questions for Nick Domitrovich. She inquired about the financial crisis in the VRBS program. It is agreed to email the budget two weeks before the next SRC meeting. When will the Categories be opened? This is unknown – it is hard to guess right now. The numbers have been ran average cost per consumers and the projections are never right. No models to determine on what the costs are going to be in the future. A question was asked about a documentation of the categories closure – Nick is unsure if a document exists. Has the State requested the re-allotment? If not, will Nick be able to go in front of legislature to talk about it? There is an issue about date of receipt on invoices. Are we moving to Department of Labor & Industry? No formal announcement on this; meetings between the departments are being planned though cancelled lately. There are federal rules to follow and a review of pros & cons. Still in discussion. We are focusing to make sure that the quality services are being provided for the consumers. Is Director Sheila not monitoring the VRBS programs? In the past, the conversations between Jim,

Bob, and Chanda were not efficient. Currently, it is more streamlined between Nick and Chanda. Any concerns should be brought up with them. Kathy talked about her clients on SSDI having to pay up money first and then VR reimbursed them – she does not like how that is being done. She commented about the requirement of filling out a request form for anything more than \$500. That seems to affect the clients and slow down the services. She also talked about her youth cases – they would be working in the summer and then get calls from counselors that they are not approved for the hours, so they must stop working. She also talked about wanting to see the contracts/work plans for the youth as she suspected that they are not getting the experience that they are supposed to. Anna says that there are quarterly reports that the school filled out to show what they did. If a case is closed, a notice is sent out.

Quality Service Update; Barbara Schiedermayer:

Barbara led a discussion on Comprehensive system of Personnel Development. There are three primary types of staff: certified rehabilitation counselor, mobility specialist, and rehabilitation teacher. Each comes with required credentials. In Montana, we chose to continue the credentials. Currently, there are 34 staff persons and 19 of them are working to earn their credentials. Due to high cost, people are uncertain of the process. There are scholarships. But if the federal rules change, the scholarships may not be available. Funding was set aside to prepare for that. VRBS programs have been able to assist with the graduate school application fees, travel expenses, stipend travel costs on campus. Credentials generally cost about \$295 - \$350. The application fee is \$400. With the changes in the budget, the person may have to take care of the cost himself. We are working to support the staff to maintain their credentials. It is important to explore different ideas which help to reduce stress of career and schooling.

Closing Comments:

The next meeting dates are September 14 & 15 in Helena. Possible agenda items:

- Another Windmills module
- Budget updates
- Possible joint meeting with SILC
- Governor's Report
- A presenter from Town Pump
- Update from Youth Service Specialist